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Introduction

The law that created NCLIS (Public Law 91-345 (20 U.S.C. 1501 *et seq.*, signed July 20, 1970) states that “library and information services adequate to meet the needs of the people of the United States are essential to achieve national goals.” It is the Commission’s responsibility to develop and recommend plans that will enable the American people to have adequate library and information services.

For 35 years the Commission has worked to fulfill its mandated mission of identifying the needs of people for library and information services, translating those needs into recommendations for national policy, and advising the President, the Congress, state and local governments and others on implementation of national policy. During that period NCLIS has engaged in many important initiatives to achieve its statutory mandate and published a number of reports of Commission findings, studies, and recommendations.

The Commission has also partnered for 20 years with the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) to develop and implement the Library Statistics Program (LSP). NCLIS has served as liaison to the library community, organized meetings and training workshops, supported in-state training and technical assistance, monitored trends, and advised NCES on policy matters. The LSP has resulted in the development of standards for library statistics, as well as the accurate and timely collection of relevant statistics to assist in policy development and implementation at the Federal, state, and local levels.

Personnel and Funding

The Commission includes the Librarian of Congress, the Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and fourteen Commissioners appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate for terms not to exceed five years. The law requires that five of the appointees be librarians or information specialists. At least one Commissioner must be “knowledgeable with respect to the technological aspects of library and information science and sciences” and one must be “knowledgeable with respect to the library and information science needs of the elderly.”

In January 2004, President Bush appointed and the Senate confirmed twelve new Commissioners, bringing the Commission to full strength. In July 2005, the IMLS Director, Robert Martin, stepped down and Mary Chute replaced him as Acting Director. In August 2005, the President nominated one Commissioner, Sandra Ashworth, whose term had expired, for a second term. He also nominated two new Commissioners, Jan

Cellucci of Massachusetts and Diane Rivers of Alabama to replace Joan Challinor and Jack Hightower, whose terms had expired. The three August nominations were confirmed by the Senate in October and the three Commissioners were sworn in by Andrew Card at the White House in December. Thus the Commission has been maintained at full strength and Dr. Beth Fitzsimmons continues as Chairman.

Commission staff comprises the executive director, director of operations, director of statistics and surveys, a management analyst (operations), and a special assistant for technology. Dr. Robert Molyneux vacated the position of director of statistics and surveys in March and Dr. Neal Kaske assumed the position in August. In order to provide additional specialized services, consultants and temporary support staff were engaged. Also, beginning in September, a graduate student intern from the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland works part-time to assist the executive director in supporting the Commissioners' initiatives.

The current financial situation is extremely tight, with insufficient funds to operate fully an independent federal agency. The size of the appropriation has not been increased since FY 2001. Even with intense efforts to reduce expenditures, including moving the agency to smaller quarters, rising costs have seriously eroded the size of the appropriation. It has become a challenge to adhere to rules, regulations, reporting procedures, compliance documentation, records management and archiving requirements, and e-government mandates required of all federal agencies.

2005 Activities

In spite of the severe budget constraints, the Commission accomplished several important goals during 2005. Using the resources available, which included the appropriation, contributions to the Gift Account, a UNESCO grant made possible by the U.S. Department of State, and off setting collections from the NCES interagency agreement, as well as the Commissioners' volunteer efforts and partnerships with other agencies and organizations, the Commission pursued initiatives in the following areas:

- **Library Services for the Aging.** This initiative, a specific statutory responsibility for the Commission, seeks to identify opportunities for improving library services for the elderly. At the same time, the initiative supports economic development by identifying how libraries might use the skills and experience of older workers as employees.

In February 2005, Commissioner Sandra Ashworth wrote an NCLIS position paper for the White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA), which was held in December 2005. Her paper was published on the Web sites of both NCLIS and the American Library Association (ALA). Ms. Ashworth and the Executive Director participated in a pre-White House Conference event held at the ALA annual conference in June and Ms. Ashworth was a delegate from Idaho to the WHCoA.

- **International library and information science issues.** During 2005, in an initiative led by Commissioner Joan Challinor, NCLIS continued to examine the role of libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa in the battle against HIV/AIDS. With the support of a grant from UNESCO, NCLIS had sent a consultant in fall 2004 to Cameroon to study the feasibility of establishing “living libraries” in vans—something like bookmobiles, but staffed with storytellers and actors as well as librarians—to travel the country and visit villages on market days. Another consultant, an expert scholar on information dissemination in developing countries, was tasked with writing a background paper, setting the broader context for the Cameroonian study and making recommendations for implementing similar programs in developing countries struggling against the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The study concluded that libraries in Africa will play a stronger role when they establish partnerships with other organizations already involved in dissemination and education activities. It also recommended that libraries in Africa should expand the scope of information sources they collect and distribute to include information sources outside the role of traditional libraries.

NCLIS published the final report of all this work in November and it is available as a pdf document on the NCLIS Web site. Requests for paper copies may be made to the NCLIS office. The report is titled “The Role of Libraries in HIV/AIDS Information Dissemination in Sub-Saharan Africa.”

Also in the international arena, the Executive Director and Commissioner Challinor attended the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) meeting in Oslo in August. In November, Dr. Challinor represented the Commission as a member of the U.S. delegation to the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis. Her report is on the Web at (<http://www.nclis.gov/libinter/internationalactivities.html>).

- **The Role of Libraries in Health Information Literacy.** Since 2004, the goal of this initiative has been to encourage all libraries in the U.S. to support Americans’ health information needs. The Commission believes that the successful implementation of this initiative will result in a healthier population, including a healthier workforce. It has been established that if people would make even small improvements in their lifestyles, there would be less illness, less suffering, more energy, fewer lost workdays, and the nation’s economy would be strengthened simply because the huge percentage of the economy now spent on health care would be significantly reduced.

An NCLIS task force led by Commissioner Mary (“Mitzi”) Perdue created Consumer Health Information Recognition Awards for Libraries to recognize those libraries that excelled in meeting the consumer health needs of American citizens. With the cooperation of the members of COSLA (Chief Officers of State Library Agencies), NCLIS presented awards to thirty-seven libraries in 2004.

In May 2005, the Commission hosted a reception at the National Agricultural Library for about 250 people. As with the awards, the reception was underwritten by donations to the Gift Account. The purpose of the gala event was to celebrate model

programs in health information provided by libraries throughout the nation. Exhibits from twelve agencies or organizations added to the informational value of the event.

The overall goal of the effort in 2004, and continuing into 2005, 2006, and beyond is to identify best practices and model programs and to share them with the larger library management community. In June 2005, a document with detailed descriptions of the thirty-seven 2004 winners was distributed to the President and Congress, and to the library and information science community. This best practices report was also published on the NCLIS Web site for library managers who want to develop or enhance their own libraries' health information programs.

In 2006, a second round of awards is planned that will again recognize outstanding library programs in each state, but will also narrow down nine semi-finalists for \$1000 prizes and one grand-prize winning library that will receive \$20,000. An all-day forum is planned at the National Library of Medicine in May 2006, followed by an awards reception. The forum will feature speakers from each of the ten top programs who will explore challenges and solutions in providing consumer health information in effective, efficient ways, especially to at-risk or underserved populations.

As a consequence of the national scope of this activity, the Commission will be able to collect a set of best practices in health communication provided by libraries throughout the country (e.g., in both rural and urban areas, areas with large elderly populations, communities with many non-English speakers), and to establish a body of knowledge that can be shared with library managers who want to develop or enhance their own libraries' health communication programs. It is anticipated that after the forum in May 2006, NCLIS will publish this body of knowledge and disseminate it widely through presentations at professional meetings, community groups, citizens' advocacy groups, and through publication on the NCLIS Web site.

- **Libraries and Educational Achievement.** This initiative seeks to identify how school libraries affect classroom learning, and to disseminate this information to community organizations, school administrators, local politicians with funding authority, the media, the larger educational community, and all others who have an interest in the role of libraries in educational achievement.

In spring 2005, the Dr. Fitzsimmons sent a letter to First Lady Laura Bush, proposing a mechanism to extend Mrs. Bush's efforts to bring awareness to the American public about school libraries and their role in educational achievement. Dr. Fitzsimmons proposed a school librarian award that would highlight the contributions of school librarians everywhere.

The next step was to approach a major publisher of children's books and supplier of library materials to underwrite the award. Again, the response was positive, and negotiations are underway to set a budget and a plan for implementing the award.

Another aspect of this initiative was executed with a letter from the Chairman to Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. In the letter Dr. Fitzsimmons recommended changes to the next version of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Secretary Spellings directed her staff to meet with the Chairman and Executive Director in mid-summer to discuss and refine the changes. The outcome is that the Commission will continue to work with Department of Education staff, especially those involved in the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries, which is a piece of the NCLB Act.

To support both of these initiatives Commissioner Allison Druin created a flyer entitled *Why Care about School Libraries?* The flyer was developed in recognition of the problem that school libraries are not fully recognized for the value they bring to the educational process. In a succinct but easily understood format, the flyer conveys the messages that school libraries:

- Are critical for student achievement
- Have an important role in teaching
- Are leading the way for technology use in schools
- Inspire literacy.

The flyer will be used to convey the findings of existing research to those individuals in leadership positions with respect to school libraries. It is available on the NCLIS Web site (<http://www.nclis.gov/info/schoollibraryactivities.html>).

- **Emergency Preparedness and the Role of Libraries** as community distribution centers for helping communities prepare for a terrorist attack, respond quickly during an attack, and recover after an attack. In spring 2005, NCLIS partnered with the Government Printing Office and lent staff support to the Special Libraries Association (SLA) for the writing of a proposal titled “Planning for Critical Emergencies: Training Librarians to Train Citizens for National Preparedness.” SLA submitted the proposal for a Department of Homeland Security training grant. Unfortunately, the proposal was not funded. However, NCLIS will continue to pursue this initiative to encourage libraries to play significant roles in their local communities’ preparation for and response to natural disasters and terrorist attacks.
- **Assessment and appraisal of library and information resources and services.** Commissioner José Aponte called for this initiative, which seeks to identify new measures to assess the value of libraries to the communities they serve. NCLIS staff organized a group of researchers and leaders in library assessment who communicate via a reflector and meetings at conferences. NCLIS is planning in 2006 to publish a summary description of the various innovative assessment measures currently in use or being developed.

Also in the area of statistics and surveys, a study funded in part by the NCLIS Library Statistics Program was completed and published by SOLINET and the HBCU Library Alliance. The title of the report is “The State of Libraries at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. It provides a statistical assessment of the libraries at HCBUs using data collected by the NCES Academic Libraries Survey.

- **NCLIS as a Federal Agency.** As an agency of the federal government, NCLIS must match the President's Management Agenda Initiatives, including investment in such government-wide initiatives as the strategic management of human capital, competitive sourcing, improved financial performance, expanded electronic government, and budget and performance integration. Because of budget limitations, NCLIS was challenged to accomplish most of them and staff turnover exacerbated the problem. However, in two areas major effort was made and goals were met in 2005:

Management review. A team of Commissioners and the Executive Director, with support and documentation from the Director of Operations, conducted a thorough review of human resources and budget in spring 2005. The team examined positions descriptions, functional areas of responsibility, flow charts of key agency functions, analyses of tasks and approximate time spent by staff, federal management laws, funding availability, federal agency accounting, NCLIS financial accounting and spreadsheets that track details of income and expenses during a fiscal year, the General Agreement for Management Support Services between the Department of Education and NCLIS, and other materials. The team concluded that it is unlikely that there are untapped resources from the appropriation that might support additional Commission initiatives. This means unfortunately that the Commission cannot generate additional resources from refining or reorganizing the administration and management of the agency.

Web site redesign. With contributions of design suggestions and technical expertise from graduate students at the University of Maryland and staff of ProQuest Company in Ann Arbor, Michigan, preliminary redesign of the NCLIS Web site was begun in spring 2005 and the new site was unveiled on November 1.

Plans For 2006

In addition to pursuing the initiatives outlined, the Commission will examine the roles of libraries in providing access to digitized information. NCLIS is co-sponsoring with the University of Michigan a national symposium to be held in March 2006 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The symposium is titled "Scholarship and Libraries in Transition: A Dialogue about the Social and Economic Impacts of Mass Digitization Projects." Its goal is to investigate the impact of mass digitization on libraries, universities, government, information policy, publishing, and education.

This symposium will provide a forum to stimulate thinking about the changing information environment and to identify the challenges and opportunities shaping future directions for libraries and scholarly communication--at both the national and local level. Six panels, each featuring nationally recognized individuals in their area of expertise, will discuss the impact of mass digitization on the economy, learning and teaching, libraries, public policy, publishing, and research.

Funding for this initiative is being provided mainly by the University of Michigan and outside sponsors. After the event, NCLIS will prepare and publish a report on the key issues discussed and conclusions reached.

This overview of its work makes clear the broad scope of the NCLIS mission. No other government agency, professional association, trade association, research and development organization, academic institution, or philanthropic organization has the statutory responsibility that is the Commission's very reason for being, to provide policy advice to the President and the Congress with respect to libraries and information science. Of course such other organizations are involved in these matters, and these organizations are invited and encouraged to partner and collaborate with the Commission in developing the knowledge that informs the Commission's recommendations to the President and Congress. All such organizations—American and international—are solicited to join with NCLIS in sharing this knowledge in the larger society, since such knowledge development and knowledge sharing is for the common good.